

ABOUT IRREMEDEABLE EDUCATION

SOBRE A IRREMEDIÁVEL EDUCAÇÃO

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ABSTRACT: In the wake of the tradition of psychoanalytic studies in education, the author elucidates the current insistence of adults, sometimes professionals, sometimes simple parents, of administering medication to children when they are not actually sick. The reasoning is structured around the counterpoint between two educational experiences that took place in the 19th century, that of the so-called wild boy of Aveyron, in post-revolutionary France, and that of Helen Keller, a seven-year-old blind and deaf girl, in the post-revolutionary United States secession war. This counterpoint allows the author to clarify what is at stake in education; not an effective education, as we are used to dreaming nowadays, but a subjectivizing education, that is, one capable of making a subject of speech emerge.

KEYWORDS: Medicalization. Subject. Childhood. Education.

RESUMO: Na esteira da tradição dos estudos psicanalíticos em educação, o autor elucidada a insistência atual dos adultos, ora profissionais ora simples pais, de administrarem medicamentos às crianças quando estas não estariam de fato doentes. O raciocínio se estrutura em torno do contraponto entre duas experiências educativas ocorridas no século XIX, a do “garoto selvagem do Aveyron”, na França pós-revolucionária e a de Helen Keller, uma menina de sete anos cega e surda, nos Estados Unidos pós-guerra de secessão. Tal contraponto permite esclarecer o que está em pauta em toda educação que se preze; não uma educação eficaz, como costuma-se sonhar hoje em dia, mas subjetivante, isto é, passível de fazer emergir um sujeito de palavra.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Medicalização. Sujeito. Infância. Educação.

RESUMEN: Siguiendo la tradición de los estudios psicoanalíticos en educación, el autor dilucida la actual insistencia de los adultos, a veces profesionales y a veces padres, en administrar medicamentos a los niños cuando no están realmente enfermos. El razonamiento se articula en torno al contrapunto entre dos experiencias educativas ocurridas en el siglo XIX, el “niño salvaje de Aveyron” en la Francia posrevolucionaria y Helen Keller, una niña sorda y ciega de siete años, en los Estados Unidos posguerra de secesión. Tal contrapunto permite aclarar lo que está en juego en toda educación que se precie; no una educación eficiente, como se acostumbra a soñar hoy en día, sino una educación subjetivadora, es decir, capaz de hacer emerger un sujeto de palabra.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Medicalización. Sujeto. Infancia. Educación.

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I do not search, I find
Pablo Picasso (our translation)

A little more than half a century ago, when we were still children, any behavior that was disapproved in the school environment was subject to some sanction. Sometimes we should go and talk to the school principal to tell him about the misconduct. The latter, after listening to us, asked us to sit in silence, watching him work, until the penance was over. On other occasions, we should write the sentence ‘I shouldn’t talk in class’ two hundred times. When we had some difficulty in math, the teacher would make us go to the blackboard to red-handedly correct our wrong way of calculating. When, at times, we were distracted in class, she would ask us if we were “on the moon of Valencia”², motivating us to smile slightly and redirect our gaze to the blackboard. When what was needed, in the opinion of our teachers, was our dedication to school tasks, then the parents were called and they knew how to give the child the time that he said he did not have to do his homework – they gave him they forbade them to go out and play with friends on the street or on the corner playground for a while.

The pedagogical merit of these correctives eludes any so-called scientific evidence. Furthermore, none of us, now in our sixties, would be able to maintain that their entrepreneurial success or the fact of having passed the entrance exam or becoming a doctor, for example, is the direct result of the way adults had of touching life with children until a few decades ago. Any of these features in our lives is nothing more than an imponderable that psychoanalysis places in the column subject of desire at the time of existential accounting (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 2021a). Some pedagogical spirits, clouded by psychological and/or financial performance, may even propose that, given the fact that this considered traditional education lacks any justification, then there is nothing better than replacing it with a more effective one. An education would supposedly be effective if it is capable of making children always there – in that imaginary place – where we wait for them, more or less (im)patiently, as fully developed beings.

However, there is something in this story that can indeed be considered, although this is decidedly beyond any utilitarian parameter. In this sense, it would be appropriate to ask what could be left of **childhood time**³ to be remembered as an adult, when we do not have in stock

² The author of this essay studied elementary school in Argentina and is still unaware of the origin of this sentence in Castilian. Why on earth, the moon that held the children's attention, had to be from Valencia and not from any other Spanish city?

³ On the preference to use “childhood time” and not simply the term childhood, see: *A psicanálise e o debate sobre o desaparecimento da infância* (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 2006) and *Figures de l’infantile* (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 2013).



these or other experiences to tell, thus implying that we too were young in a not-so-long past. There just isn't much left worth remembering. If we take away from childhood the fact that we were once a child destined not to be trapped in this place where we were ghostly sought after by adults, then there is not much left that deserves to be told. These 'fouls committed' say as much about ourselves as about the adults who saw fit to play, in a unique way, a certain place of responsibility in the educational enterprise. In short, they speak of the type of social bond that developed between adults and children at a moment in our history or, in other words, they speak of the social imaginary that is possible to inhabit in a given time and in which every educational experience is rooted. According to psychoanalytic studies in education, these lacks speak of **desire as a lack that makes both encounter and mismatch or difference in the intimacy of the intergenerational bond** (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 1999, 2013, 2021a).

In this sense, today's children run the risk of not having much worth remembering tomorrow. Unless someone thinks that **being sick** or suffering from different and varied syndromes has some fun in being remembered when grown up in a conversation with our children and/or students. On the contrary, remembering that an accident could have been fatal, or that with some effort and care, we ended up overcoming an illness is something very different. The first event tells of our good fortune, the second of our perseverance.

When illness covers the entirety of existence, then it is no longer possible **to be sick**, because one **becomes sick**. In cases of chronic diseases that erupt at a moment in life, the question is how the sick person can still enjoy a non-diseased being in order **to be sick**, without **being sick**. Such a challenge is not an easy thing when it comes to big people and diseases of the body. However, the examples of those who manage to preserve their being from illness, disability or bodily loss are numerous. Nor is the number of people whose psychic investment in life is reduced to the hobby of waiting resignedly for the miracle that will restore their lost performance. When it comes to children and, even more, to supposed illnesses in the way of being, turning around becomes unlikely. Indeed, when a child is diagnosed, a **disease in the being**, the supposed disease, parasitizes the being through its entrails. The weight of this state-being holophrase compromises the child's chances of conquering for himself a unique place as **a subject in an ongoing history** and, thus, of **saying that he came into the world together with others**.

There are diseases that are not, in fact: they look like diseases, but they are not. Diseases of the body are diseases, some are curable and some are not. On the other hand, those that look like diseases, but are not, correspond to **modes of existence**. They are sometimes called diseases of the spirit or soul. However, although there may be more or less troubled souls or spirits, this



does not mean that they are or became sick. Every disease worth its salt implies a state more or less deviated from a biological functioning considered standard or normal with a view to the survival of the organism. Thus, the so-called diseases of the spirit are a contradiction in terms: either they are not diseases or they do not concern the spirit, although this good may suffer⁴.

Being disorderly, hopeful, or lazy are not diseases. Being heterosexual, homosexual, unsympathetic, depressed, happy, hardened, obsessive or aversive to marriage are not diseases either, although none of these ways of being is exempt from the psychic discomfort inherent to any and all human existence. Missing spellings, not learning math, being scattered in class, not being very supportive of friends, not going to school excitedly, or being more or less fussy are not diseases either. That's why psychotropic pills don't even tickle the ways of touching human life. Pharmacology is incapable of affecting the individual in his intimacy, although it can numb or accelerate certain physiological reactions of the medicated person who, from a certain distance, can even give the impression of being much better. Neither, comparatively, but in the strict register of molecular life, a dose of paracetamol capable of reducing fever is incapable of opposing resistance to the advance of Covid infection. In short, the so-called benefits of medicines melt into the air after a while when it comes to wanting to suture **the malaise inherent in human existence** (FREUD, 1973c).

The existence of a subject, a being of the **word**, or a *parlêtre*, according to the neologism dear to Jacques Lacan (2001), implies the existence of a living organism, but the being of the *parlêtre* is not biomolecular. Therefore, pharmaceuticals, as well as surgery, can make it possible for a sick body to rebalance the chances of living longer, as there are diseases that kill quickly if nothing is done. However, no way of being, whether heterosexuality, homosexuality, depression, sympathy, ADHD, dyscalculia, dyslexia, etc. have the power to kill in themselves and, for this very reason, no doctor makes reference to any of them on a death certificate.

In this sense, it is worth asking: why do we insist today on medicating children who scream, who don't stop moving, who have spelling mistakes, who don't calculate correctly or who focus their attention on the Valencia Moon?

The brain is unable to think

The adult epidemic of administering medication to children, even though they are not actually sick, follows a number of reasons of different content and caliber. Two elements of this equation are worth mentioning.

⁴ Self-proclaimed childhood autism prevention initiatives usury fall into this contradiction, although they claim not to be iatrogenic (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 2021a).



On the one hand, we are unable to free ourselves from the illusion that the forms of *parlêtre* are epiphenomena of organic life. We insist on confusing the fact that a person needs the brain to indulge in the most varied thoughts with the brain's inability to think. Contrary to this illusion, in solidarity with that other one of being able to extract that stone of madness, but at the time when children were already taking Fontoura biotonic, although not yet Ritalin, Jean Piaget (1967) argued that although we must be alive to think mathematically, neurology will never explain why 2 plus 2 is 4, for the simple reason that neurons don't think. Brain functioning does not cause or structure thought. As I understand it, the brain is simply a limit for a *parlêtre*. However, nowadays and as proof of the hegemonic pregnancies of this illusion, not even supporters of the so-called Brazilian pedagogical constructivism are able to distrust the habit of medicating children under the pretext of having supposedly been born or contracted dyslexia or dyscalculia.

On the other hand, there is the very adult fall that children are there, in that place, where we fantasize them, or, in other words, the hope that they will always respond from the place they occupy in our unconscious phantasm, there being no lack some in education. Thus, we spare no effort to correct the response considered to be **an indication of an alleged deviation**. In this way, a vicious circle is closed: the very adult desire to make the child always appear well focused in the photo, that is, not lacking, embodies the belief in epiphenomenal reductionism which, in turn, grants pseudoscientific credibility to the which lacks any justification.

The reader should not conclude that the author of this essay considers it wonderful that a child does not learn to read and write with some correction or that another cannot conclude that 2 plus 2 is 4. That this is worrying and that it implies our Adult responsibility does not justify being considered responses from a deviant being. Because? For the simple fact that there is no deviation, no norm. We must not confuse miscalculations, false knowledge, hasty reasoning and more or less delusional ideas with deviations from the thinking of a brain. **No brain thinks, just as there is no normal way for the *parlêtre* to think.** Between thinking and organic life, which by supporting it also places a limit on it, the relationship is one of mortal struggle, but not of cause and effect.

Faced with a child who does not learn to read, write or calculate, when, in principle, this knowledge is taught to him with a certain parsimony in a literate society, when a child is condemned to mutism, he either talks non-stop or does not say anything at all, or cannot to stop walking on tiptoe, or toss around incessantly, it is possible to think that she is not well with herself or with others to the point that she loses the direction of social circulation and gets tangled up in being. Every time it is not possible for a *parlêtre* to say what he came into the



world for, the being gets bogged down in psychic suffering. Therefore, **all these ways of being of the child in a place of being of exception in the social bond speak of the suffering of the *parlêtre* come to say with others**. This difficulty is all yours, but it is at the same time the result of how the child is positioned in the face of the demands and desires of adults, in the order of 50% each. In this sense, an intervention that aims to change the status quo must hook thinking by the gut, that is, the being of the *parlêtre* that is being said in the field of word and language (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 2020d, 2021a, 2021b). Administering drugs in these cases not only does not change the equation in favor of thinking, of unfolding the *parlêtre*, but even more, it meta-transmits to the child that adults do not want to know about their suffering due to the fact that they have sunk into an impasse with themselves and with others. This does not bode well in the education of a child.

Intending to extirpate the behavior or a child's response considered deviated for the 'good of the child' is not as valuable as the simple pretension of teaching a child to write without spelling mistakes, since the language deserves our respect as much as the child deserves to enjoy the opportunity to join us in this endeavor. Intending to erase the deviation is the tip of the iceberg of an unconscious way that we have to address the child, which in this case implies our rejection of accepting **the difference in question in all education** (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 1999). Education implies both a meeting with a child and a mismatch. The found is not the sought after. This difference returns to the transvested adult in the form of an indication of a deviant being-child to be corrected thanks to miraculous medication. Medicalization confirms the very adult fall of wanting to know nothing that the deviation seen is in fact nothing more than a difference in position in the field of speech and discourse between generations. Adults do not want to know anything about this difference that every child must know how to play in **the conquest of a unique place as a subject in an ongoing history in the field of words and language**. This achievement implies that the child will come to extract himself from this place in which the adult seeks him. If the child does not produce this difference for himself again and again, then he is confused in saying what for he came to men's lives.

What every child shows the adult, whether or not it is considered a supposed deviation to be corrected, is its own product, that is, it is the result of the psychic work involved in the fact that it must deal with the demands and the desire of adults. When the child actually learns with a certain lightness of mind what he is taught – the most varied knowledge – it means that he is able to sustain two distinct psychic operations in the same and unique time: on the one hand, to hook himself to the signifiers that articulate the educational experience and, on the



other hand, to drop the objectifying bias embedded in the operation of apprehending the signifiers set to circulate by the adult.

Every baby who launches into the word, who speaks, ends up one day enunciating any word with a certain clarity and distinction, except for those two so impatiently stimulated (sic) by the parents, that is, 'mommy' or 'daddy'. Why is it that the baby can't offer the words so sought after? Because delivering 'this'⁵ without further barriers implies answering from this place where the child is illusory for adults. It would be like answering in echo. Speaking, then, implies a double and same operation of alienation and separation, in which the second move, which is not in fact such, comes to repress, or erase, the first. On the other hand, the fact that the child closes himself up in silence or speaks echoly speaks of his impossibility to sustain the psychic operation of repression of the adult desire that he respond from the place where he is dreamed of, or, in other words, the impossibility of it will come to extract itself as a subject from this place of phantom object on the horizon.

The event of speaking is 100% the nature of a subject, but that does not mean that the child and the adult do not contribute 50% each. No child launches into speech if an adult does not address 'his word' to him, although not a few consider speaking to be natural. The child takes the adult's word by assault, uttering a different term than the one sought. In this way, the 50% that the child holds end up in fact becoming 'the child' 100%. There is no way to spare the child the psychic work involved in any and all learning. This work will always be done regardless of one of the two dimensions of adult addressing. The success in the enterprise is all credit to the subject who operates in the child, but it is likely that the desire at stake in the education regarding which the child must position himself as a subject ingrain for the child a challenge out of all proportion. In this case, education may well become a difficult event (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 1999).

The fact that a child takes a step on its own in the conquest of a place of subject, ingrains on the part of the adult the acceptance of a difference produced by the child himself when moving from the place where he is sought. Of this the adults are not very willing to know, because narcissism rages. In this sense, pharmacology, the armed wing of the medicalization of life with children, ended up becoming a great ethical alibi.

⁵ The term 'this' refers to the Freudian unconscious. In a way, what is at stake in speech is the recognition of subjection to the unconscious. "Giving over the unconscious" would be equivalent to getting rid of it.



Of a wild boy and a blind and deaf girl

Administering medicine to children, even though they are not sick, is one aspect of medicalization. However, medicalization as a way of understanding the education of a child and, therefore, what is at stake in **the psychic time of childhood** (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 2006, 2013), began well before the pharmaceutical industry became one of the most profitable. It began at the beginning of the 19th century, when Jean Itard (1994) decided to educate what not only he, but the social imaginary of the time, considered to be a wild child. There is no record that this doctor administered any type of drug. Perhaps his only attempt to alter bodily functioning, with a view to facilitating the learning of everything he thought to teach the boy found in 1800 wandering in a forest in the French region of the Aveyron, was to give him regular baths with almost boiling water, from a rather absurd hypothesis.

The education of the 'wild boy' was the work not only of a physician, but of modern medical reasoning. Education was designed according to the motor rehabilitation model: methodical repetition of increasingly complex movements or activities with a view to ensuring that the damaged parts of the body involved in the task progressively respond to normal functioning parameters. Itard (1994), unlike his famous teacher, the doctor, Philippe Pinel, did not consider the boy to be sick. But unfortunately, the good intuition at the start was neutralized by the fact that Itard (1994) imagined the perfect opposite of the disease, that is, he considered that the boy's body was in a virginal state, ready to respond to the doctor's command according to the principles of 'moral medicine'. His endeavor ended up becoming a model. It supports the so-called education proposed today to autistic children. Perhaps the latter, combining training and pharmacology, should be considered the *summum* of the medicalization process. But it also underlies, despite appearances to the contrary, the matrix of what I call (psycho)pedagogical illusion (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 1999, 2020b), that is, the belief that it is both possible and necessary to adapt adult intervention to the 'form child's natural being. The 'wild boy' is to some extent the perfect mirror opposite of the current imaginary child. He seems to be devoid of all natural knowledge, the same supposed to operate 'naturally' in the 'normal' child these days. However, Itard (1994) does not get carried away by appearances, as he is convinced that the boy is the depository of a dormant natural human knowledge that the moral medical device will know how to awaken in a methodical way.

Education *a la Itard* illustrates precisely what should not be done, under penalty of imploding the set of structural conditions necessary for the education of a child. At the opposite extreme, the 19th century also offered us, almost ninety years later, the education of a blind and



deaf girl – Helen Keller – thanks to the singular implication of Anne Sullivan. Both adults did not address children in the same way, although the young American pedagogue breathed the same ideas that the French doctor had forged in an inaugural form at the beginning of the century. In the case of Helen Keller, the merit of what was learned was all hers, but her educator showed up with the necessary 50% in education. Education *a la Sullivan* is not the opposite of that in the fashion of Itard (1994) and, therefore, it is not “what should be done”, as parents and pedagogues, avid for methods, often question. The educational experience from which Helen knew how to benefit is just the opposite of the 'education of a savage'. Although successful, it is not an educational method to be followed, because **despite our regrets, there is no normative model in education.**

At first glance, we thought that the chances of Helen speaking being deaf and blind would be minimal, unlike Victor, who did not suffer from any sensory impairment. The examination by contrast allows to situate and question the difference between both experiences. The hypothesis is that from the set of conditions for the possibility of educating a child, the way we have to address our word to him constitutes precisely a prince element of the experience. This adult addressing concerns the adult's unconscious position in relation to desire, always challenged by the very fact of having to deal with a child in education (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 1999; 2013; 2021b).

We will briefly recall some elements of these two events that made history. A simple parallelism will already allow us to place the set of conditions for the education of each child.

Jean Itard (1994) was a young doctor, while Anne Sullivan was a young woman without a degree, just out of Boston College for the Blind.

Victor is a child of approximately 10 or 12 years old, captured in the woods, considered clinically normal by Itard (1994), but at the same time 'wild' from a psychic point of view. On the other hand, it is known that Helen Keller was born in good health and that when she was two years old, she became blind and deaf due to an infection. Anne Sullivan will say, when they first met on a March 1887 day (the little girl was seven years old), that she was a capricious child, but intelligent and eager to learn.

The common point is that neither Victor nor Helen spoke when meeting with their respective educators. Jean Itard (1994) leaves Victor after five years, having the conviction that there was nothing more to be done. On the contrary, Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller became friends and never left. Although the first got married, the second went to live in the couple's neighborhood. Helen was forever blind and deaf, but she started to speak. She becomes a writer in her teens. By the way, it will be thanks to the publication of her books that we will learn



something about what may have happened between her and her educator. For her part, Anne Sullivan left written letters to her friends at the *Perkins School for the Blind*, in particular addressed to their principal, but it is thanks to Helen that we can read them today, as she published them after her friend's death. Helen died at the age of 88, after dedicating her life to promoting the education of children with disabilities, particularly the blind.

Finally, both educational experiences were brought to the big screen. In the beautiful French film *O garoto Selvagem* (1969), the filmmaker François Truffaut himself plays the role of the doctor. On the other hand, the meeting of little Helen with young Anne inspired the American Arthur Penn to film in 1962, *The Miracle Worker*. This one was named differently depending on the country where it was going to be shown. The French translation of the first should have been *La travailleuse miraculeuse* [The Miracle Worker], but it was shown in France under the title *Miracle en Alabama* [Miracle in Alabama]. The Brazilian version was called *O milagre de Anne Sullivan* (The miracle of Anne Sullivan), while the Portuguese version was presented with the title *O milagre de Helen Keller* (The miracle of Helen Keller). As we can see everyone agrees on one point: this story is indeed a miracle! The disagreement, however, is over who would be the agent of the miracle. The Americans claim that it is only someone who works, the Brazilians think it was the adult, the Portuguese the child and finally the French refrain from identifying the miracle worker in history, claiming that the fact that a blind and deaf child could speak is, yes, a miracle, and that the same thing happened one day in Alabama!

Precisely, following the trail of the misunderstanding around the miraculous character of Helen's education, we can question **the place of the word within the conditions of a child's education**, considering as a counterexample in the matter, the destiny reserved for Victor. In matters of miracles, we can in any case always identify an agent. Who does the miraculous work of Helen Keller's education? The seven-year-old? The educator, fourteen years older? Neither one nor the other. Both experienced the subjection of the miracle inherent in the work of the word itself. What was at stake in education was the operation of the **signifying function**, as Lacan (1966) would say, which establishes the possibility of having an experience within the field of word and language, of always discovering ourselves as another. The signifying function is intrinsic to the *parlêtre*, that is, intrinsic to the being that cannot not be said in the difference with others, under penalty of being parasitized by psychic suffering.

Although Itard's (1994) pedagogical adventure has deserved a prominent place in the annals of science, what it teaches is, on the contrary, what should not be done in the education of a child. The doctor's dream of shaping the child's being implied the perversion of the



conditions that make a self-respecting education possible. Every adult must renounce this dream so that a child can extract himself from this place where he is sought and thus conquer for himself **a place of enunciation in his own name**, of a subject of speech in an ongoing history.

Itard (1994) embodies the pedagogical fury that does not recognize the impossibility of education (FREUD, 1973b). He personifies the pedagogical vow of finding the ideal child, deprived of all knowledge⁶ and willing to be freed from this radical ignorance by the grace of the master who would thus convert him into his inverted clone, that is, into a complete subject not subject to the division imposed by significant logic, not subject to desire. The pedagogical fury derives from the adult's wanting to know nothing about his own condition as a divided subject. The adult projects the opposite of the self onto the child. All supposedly ideal education presents itself as a whatever civilizing mission 'for the good' of the recipient. Pedagogical frenzy perverts the conditions for the possibility of an education, as it demands from the child its own eclipse as a *parlêtre*. The child is forced to renounce the condition of subject in order to deserve some adult recognition.

Victor answered the call, made himself understood by Madame Guerin when he was hungry or when he wanted to go out for a walk. He effectively inhabited language. However, Itard, although admitting that the child communicated, could not admit that such a thing was possible without “the need for any previous teaching” (ITARD, 1994, p. 43, our translation). According to him, nothing was possible outside the supposedly scientific program, that is, he himself had to be at the origin of everything. Thus, Itard (1994, p. 44, our translation) concludes that it must be a “language of action [...] primitive of the human species” and, therefore, that Victor did not truly inhabit the field of speech and language. However, the boy insisted on providing the counter-proof that he, in fact, inhabited it. Victor even stammered a few words. The doctor recognized the name Julie—Mrs. Guerin – when Victor said “*gli*”, the noun “milk” spelled out clearly, and finally Mrs. Guerin “oh my God!” when the boy said “*ohh Diie*”. However, Victor never got around to engaging in a speech. Was that within his reach? It's impossible for us to know. But one thing is certain, the pedagogical device destined to make him speak consisted in the abortion of the human word. By the way, perhaps, this failure allowed Victor to preserve something of the desire that concerned him insofar as he refused to hand over to Itard (1994) what he was obsessively looking for – speech.

Jean Itard (1994) admitted that speech differentiated us from animals, but did not understand that its use presupposed the operation in the child of a subject to which the adult

⁶ This pedagogical vow is the reverse of this other one of finding a child in whom natural knowledge already operates in such a way that the adult will be exempt from having to be involved in education.



had, in a logically previous time, recognized **a singular place of enunciation in a story**. In this way, he ended up shuffling the structural conditions of an education. The doctor acted in the opposite direction of what a mother unconsciously follows when she metaphorizes the sounds babbled by the infant, making him 'her baby', as well as converting all sounds into words subject to a singular intentionality that escapes adult control. For psychoanalysis, a mother's engagement in this direction is a function of her unconscious position in relation to desire, not depending on the linguistic and scientific knowledge that she might have. This was precisely the position from which Anne Sullivan addressed Helen.

The educational experience proposed by Itard (1994) was structured from the systematic refusal of desire. It was nothing more than a kind of pedagogical trap, because whatever Victor's response in the methodical stimulation exercises, he was not considered as someone animated by a desire to be recognized, as a subject who pleads to say what he came to do in the human world. If he didn't respond as expected, according to the doctor, it was because he didn't understand. If, on the contrary, he answered correctly, Itard (1994) thought that it was mere chance. If Victor finally got around to talking, then he had been unintentionally informing about a need to be satisfied. The impromptu speech, as well as the one that was expected, but that had been given outside the previously established parameters, were judged as the expression of the wild nature of the boy. At the same time, responding as expected meant for Victor to validate his own psychic death, insofar as the pedagogical demand reduced him to the condition of an object of enjoyment or satisfaction for Itard (1994). In these situations, the doctor repeated the intervention in the form of a retest to ensure that the answer was the same one sought. He unconsciously condemned Victor to choose between two fates: surrender to the frantic echolalia or simply not respond, being totally lost in the face of demand in a kind of psychic collapse.

Victor embodied, whether the nature sought by the doctor, or the opposite, savagery. However, contrary to what we might suppose, although Victor might not respond as expected, he never disappointed Itard (1994), as he found him in the same illusory place as always, where he was sought after even before he was captured in the Aveyron forest. The doctor always had an explanation within his reach to restore the narcissism thwarted by "his" recalcitrant savage. The place reserved for the boy in this story consisted of illustrating the apodictic truth of the Itardian reflection and from this place Victor could not escape, turning around this dreamed destiny.

Anne Sullivan's letters and Helen Keller's books allow us to situate their experience as the opposite of Itard's (1994) medical-moral treatment. There is no doubt that Anne's position as an educator, her way of addressing Helen, is different from that of the doctor. And this is not



without consequences. This difference makes it precisely possible for the word to emerge in the child despite deafness and blindness.

In the letters of the young educator to her friends in Boston, her uncertainties, her difficulties linked to blindness, appear, not only with that almost blindness in the proper sense that made her tear up and that made her eyes sensitive to luminosity, but that in a figurative sense, that lack of light at the end of the tunnel on the journey she had undertaken when she took the job at the Keller house. Anne confesses that she doesn't know how far her involvement in Helen's education will take her, but that at the same time she is unable to abandon her. By the way, she didn't accept the job out of pure philanthropy or because she felt invested in some redemptive mission, but simply because she needed a job to earn the first salary of her life. As she herself writes in one of the letters, she had accepted the job “forced by the need to earn a living” (KELLER, 1903, p. 179, our translation). Perhaps, in addition to the obvious need to earn a salary, Anne's declaration should be heard in another way: it was about the imperative to conquer a place in life, a place of enunciation in her own name, beyond the disastrous fate that was in store for her when she entered the Tewksbury Asylum with her younger brother, both abandoned by their father. Therefore, her stance was not the same as that of Itard (1994) who had engaged in the experiment in the name of scientific progress, against the backdrop of a prestige bet with the famous Philippe Pinel.

Arthur Penn's film shows us an Anne Sullivan who advances blindly, without clear and precise objectives. It does not 'scientifically reflect on its practice', as Itard (1994) did in an inaugural way, to the point that nowadays it should be elevated to the category of the patron saint of reflective pedagogues. Anne simply wanted to talk to Helen and for that she used the only possible way when dealing with a blind and deaf interlocutor – the manual alphabet. For his part, to paraphrase Françoise Dolto, Itard did not *speak to* Victor, but spoke about him to others through his reports, in particular addressed to his colleagues at the *Société des observateurs de l'homme* and to the minister of the interior.

Everything indicates that Anne's psycholinguistic knowledge was rudimentary. She shared the same associationist idea as Itard (1994) – talking is associating signs with things designed to satisfy a need. However, her enunciative position was not the same as the doctor's. Anne Sullivan acted with Helen with the conviction that the little girl was not only capable of communicating, but that she possessed the same linguistic intelligence as her and, therefore, that she simply inhabited language. The conviction was such that when it came to justifying Helen's progress in the dialogue, the justification given was rudimentary: as Helen's brain has all the ideas (sic), then, it is only necessary to have a little more patience to be able to establish



a worthy dialogue. The precariousness of Anne's theoretical reflection in no way compromised this true educational experience. The more or less scientific ideas that an adult claims to follow count for little in experience, because what it is always about is the unconscious conditions of possibility that relate to adult desire. If this is anonymous (LACAN, 1986) in the sense that the adult rejects the unconscious castration that animates him and that singularizes the place of the word in an ongoing story, then the structural coordinates of an education end up falling apart in the air. For this same reason, we must also be suspicious of any automatic invocation of pedagogical slogans, however politically or psychologically correct they may seem.

Anne wanted to talk to Helen, had something to say to her, just as she wanted to hear something from her. This 'her' makes both a reference to Helen in the sense that Anne wanted to listen to the girl, but also that Anne wanted to hear something of herself, of her own intimacy, of her saga as a *parlêtre*. It is thanks to the letters that we know that Anne was groping in her role as an educator. In this sense, Arthur Penn's film was able to convey what was at stake for her in the educational experience with Helen. It shows a young woman cornered at night by ghosts and childhood memories. The educator, like Helen, was also groping in the dark.

Itard (1994) – unlike Anne – did not want to know anything about groping in the dark, having to deal with ghost characters and childhood memories, or even more with getting lost in dreams in order to discover someone else. Victor's upbringing changed nothing in Itard's relationship with himself.

On the other hand, the reminiscences that Anne Sullivan interrogated had been revived by her own involvement in Helen's upbringing. They never ceased to haunt her, demanding to be recognized, welcomed (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 2019). It was precisely this questioning in which Anne had become involved that allowed the re-launch of the symbolization of the difference in positions between the adult and the child that permeates every educational experience. This implication of Anne made it possible for the word to do its work and, thus, come to relaunch again and again **the unfolding of the conquest of a place of enunciation in their own name**, of a place of speech for each of the protagonists.

The emergence of a subject of speech

Educating implies putting into circulation symbolic or significant traits that allow the child to be involved in the endless conquest of a place from which desire is possible. This is the opposite of what Itard (1994) put into action with Victor. This is exactly what Anne did without having any knowledge of the matter but sustained in experience by an unconscious knowledge.



The said acquisition of speech is the result of the operation of a subject of desire in the child. **The emergence of the word or the speech addressed to another can be considered the mark par excellence of the desiderative subjection to any language** and the *princeps* effect of a successful primordial education. In this sense, the precariousness of Victor's speech denotes a failure of the educational device supported by Itard (1994). However, we will never know what the boy's fate would have been had he not fallen into the hands of the inventive and tenacious doctor. However, Helen's loquacity, as her rich biography testifies, is undoubtedly the hallmark of a self-respecting education.

Why do we speak? To teach and interrogate. What? The truth. Although animals communicate, the dimension of truth does not concern them. The truth only concerns the *parlêtre*. Sigmund Freud, unlike Jean Itard, did not understand that man entered the dimension of truth thanks to systematic contact with things. According to Freud (1973a), the dimension of truth permeates the psychic fabrication of the **Idea of Father** within the experience of life together with others. The Idea of a father is a *sui generis* idea because it lacks any meaning as it is an unconscious idea that escapes reflexivity. For this double reason, the Idea of the father is called in Lacanian thought the **signifier Name-of-the-Father**. It is the directing signifier of the field of word and language that aims at the truth of the *parlêtre* (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 2013; 2019). The psychic production of the signifier Name-of-the-Father takes the place of Ariadne's thread that allows us not to lose the north in the experience, groping in the darkness of more or less secret passions and reminiscences according to the testimonies of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan. Speaking implies placing an Idea of a father there where before on the horizon there was only the shadow of an omnipotent father who muzzles the word, according to Freud's hypothesis (1973a). The emergence of the word establishes a difference in the phylogenesis of the human: from the primeval horde of orphans at the mercy of the strongest primate to a first human organization governed by the unconscious idea of a father (FREUD, 1973a). The word carries the mythical memory of a pleasure shared between mute orphans on the way to self-produce humans when the head of the horde is murdered. In this sense, the said acquisition of speech carries the trace of the pleasure shared between the child and the adult in having barred the **omnipotence of being**, a sine qua non condition for the emergence of the *parlêtre*⁷.

What does the education conceived by Itard (1994) mean according to the principles of moral medicine at the time? Simply the shard of the coordinates of the word emergence. In this sense, for Victor to have a chance of escaping the disastrous fate that was in store for him, it

⁷ In a next opportunity, we will develop this hypothesis when dealing specifically with the speech of the word 'water' by Helen.



would have been necessary for his education to have something like Helen's. Well, it was not a question of 'morally healing' Victor or of extirpating his 'wild being', but of letting the psychic production of an Idea of a Father germinate in experience, thanks to the questioning of the desire that every adult must witness in the education of a child. The production of this idea would have been the indication of the boy's orientation in the experience of saying that he came into the world together with others. The chances of him occupying a singular place of enunciation in a story were few from the beginning, considering the type of subjective implication on the part of the physician in the experience. If the doctor had done his necessary 50%, then the boy would have had to do the 50% sufficient to score 'his' 100%. However, Itard's pedagogical device supported the omnipotence of being, making education a difficult event (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 1999).

As Itard (1994) massacred the possibilities of the Idea of a father coming to operate, the entry into the register of truth became an act of difficult happening. The absence of this operation reduced Victor to the status of an animal to be trained, that is, to be always 'there' in this precise place where he was obsessively sought after by the doctor. If, on the contrary, the Idea of a father had operated in the experience, the boy could have enjoyed a place that was both filial and familiar, either as a disciple or as an apprentice of Jean Itard. However, that is not what happened. The doctor refused the possibility of discovering someone other than himself. If that had happened, he would have given evidence in education **of being subject to castration or the law of desire** (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 1999; 2013; 2020a; 2020b).

An animal trainer is neither a master, nor a father, nor a mother. He can't get lost in daydreams, dreams and reminiscences of childhood, if he doesn't want to lose his mind in the lions' cage. On the contrary, teachers, parents and educators must be willing to lose theirs, as it is known that they will not be able to hold the bar once they are involved in educating. The production by a child of the Idea of Father implies the adult's renunciation of gluing in the place of the almighty who does not recognize the law that prohibits responding narcissistically to the *hate-love* (LACAN, 1975, p. 84) addressed by the child. In fact, teachers, fathers and mothers must address the child as common people, that is, referring to the law of desire that governs the unfolding of the social bond.

Itard (1994) had an overwhelming need to ignore desire. Desire was an *affaire* that literally made him lose his mind. Striving not to lose her in Victor's upbringing, she did everything she could to find him where she was looking for him. In short, **he did what should not be done in the education of a child**, because in order for the child to have his head in



place, the adult – as Helen’s education experience well recalls – must be willing to lose himself, to lose their pretense of mastery.

Final considerations

The 'education of the wild' became a paradigm of what came to be called specialized pedagogy. Until the emergence of the first alternative educational initiatives, such as the Bonneuil school, inspired by decades of accumulated experience of psychoanalysis with children, education *a la Itard* imposed itself as an experience to be reduplicated in the education to be offered to children called sometimes idiots, sometimes disabled, sometimes with special educational needs (DE LAJONQUIÈRE, 1999; 2020c). The ‘spirit of Itard’ ended up becoming hegemonic in the social imaginary, thus becoming the key to understanding any and all education. It was, for example, invoked at the beginning of the last century, but without the doctor being explicitly mentioned, by the American psychologist John B. Watson, who with his behavioral manifesto created the adult illusion of producing children always predisposed to respond from this phantasmatic place where they are sought after by adults. Nowadays, the ‘spirit of Itard’ or the omnipotent illusion that between the child and the adult nothing will be lacking, thus coming to embody the ghost of an omnipotent father, is promoted by the pharmaceutical industry.

All education charges a price, that of recognizing the desire that inhabits us as *parlêtres* and, therefore, demands that we renounce the medicalization of that which has no remedy. An indispensable condition for an education to succeed where we least narcissistically seek it. Pretending that an education succeeds, without the child coming to move from this place that is unconsciously reserved for him by adults, constitutes a contradiction in terms that no drug will come to remedy. The saga of Dr. Itard illustrates our insistence on always looking for our so-called self in the same place, at the price of condemning children to the disastrous fate of not being able to speak with others.

In the education of a child today, as before, it is better to come to stand on the side of Anne Sullivan, that is, to know that we are ordinary people dealing with the irremediable difference that nestles in our educational approach to children. Unconsciously knowing this inevitable difference means that what we do or fail to do does not come as a remedy for anything, but simply testifies to our unique position as a subject of speech in an ongoing story.



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